

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
(OR-030-98-009)**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

BLM Office: Vale

Proposed Action: MJ River Fence

Application: N/A

Location: T.18S., R.36E., Sec. 4; T.17S., R.36E., Sec. 33 & 28

**Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans:** This proposed action is subject to the Northern Resource Area Management Framework Plan 1994 and Ironside Grazing Environmental Impact Statement 1982. Both documents constitute the current land use plan for Malheur Resource Area. These documents have been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. Fence construction to improve livestock distribution and to control the season of use, reducing localized physical and physiological impacts to the vegetation resources, is consistent with these plans. Implementation of special grazing treatments to control livestock impacts to stream-side riparian communities with medium to high potential for improvement is consistent with planing objectives.

**Need for and Description of the Proposed Action:** The area to the west of the North Fork Malheur River is not completely fenced, and cattle may trespass the river corridor. Construction of the fence would solve this problem. The proposed action is to construct approximately 2.5 miles of fence on the west side of the North Fork Malheur River to improve riparian communities. This action will allow these communities to recover from incidental, unscheduled use. The north/south oriented fence will be a four-strand barbed-wire fence. To allow wildlife passage, the lower wire will be 16 inches from the ground and the top wire will be no higher than 42 inches from the median ground level. The proposed fence will be constructed as straight as possible on the west rim and a small section will go through private land and tie into an existing allotment fence on the south. On the north side, the fence will tie into a steep-walled canyon; a gap fence may be installed on the bottom and tie into a existing fence to the north as mapped in Figure 1. Brace points will be constructed with rock cribs located at approximately every 0.25 miles. Five foot fence posts will be placed no greater than 22 feet apart and two stays will be placed between posts. Maintenance of the proposed riparian fence will become the responsibility of the Beulah Allotment permittee (as are all fences identified in the Cooperative Agreement for Rangeland Improvements signed in January of 1976).

Proposed livestock grazing within the river corridor will be as follows: rest one year; graze the following year from 4/15–5/15; rest one year; graze the following year from 5/1–6/1; then repeat the 4-year rotation.

**Affected Environment:**

**Vegetation**—Vegetation is predominantly associations of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *tridentata* and *Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*) bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*) and small amounts of western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*). Ecological condition is late seral stage.

***Livestock Grazing***—The project area is within the Beulah Allotment which is managed under a deferred rotation grazing rotational grazing system incorporating 19 pastures and 2 grazing permittees.

***Recreation and Visual Resources***—As part of the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988, Congress designated for study a 14.8-mile segment of the North Fork Malheur River to determine if the river segment is eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). There are no Wilderness Study Areas in this allotment. Recreation use is light and generally of a dispersed nature, mainly associated with big game hunting and fishing. The project area is located on the edge of two Visual Resource Management (VRM) areas. The area to the north is rated in VRM Class II, the central area VRM Class I, and to the south VRM Class II.

***Wildlife***—Wildlife values include habitat for pronghorn, elk, mule deer, neotropical migratory song birds, and small mammals.

***Cultural Resources***—There are no known or suspected cultural resources within the project area.

***Threatened and Endangered Species***—There are no known or suspected threatened and endangered species within the project area.

***Other mandatory elements***—The following mandatory elements are either not present or would not be effected by the proposed action or alternatives:

Air Quality  
Native American Religious Concerns  
Hazardous Wastes  
Prime or Unique Farmlands  
Area of Critical Environmental Concern  
Floodplains  
Water Quality  
Wetlands / Riparian Zones  
Wilderness  
Wild Horse and Burros

### **Environmental Consequences:**

***No Action Alternative***—Livestock access to approximately 2 miles of the riparian communities adjacent to the North Fork Malheur River during midsummer and late fall would continue with the "no action" on the proposed fence. The current grazing rotation within the Beulah Allotment schedules livestock grazing in MJ Field West Pasture annually during some portion of summer. Annual mid-summer grazing of the riparian vegetation communities is not compatible with maintenance of healthy woody or herbaceous vegetation communities.

***Proposed Action***—Construct approximately 2.5 miles of permanent fence following Bureau specifications along the aforementioned location within the Beulah Allotment. The fence would enhance livestock control; livestock would no longer drift down to the river and graze the river corridor at time other than when scheduled. This action would result in maintenance or improvement of the vegetative

resource.

Existing roads or ways would be used for access during fence construction and a minimal amount of off-road use would occur along the fence line. No blading along the fence line would be permitted either during construction or for maintenance of the existing fence. All construction debris (wire, posts, etc.) would be removed from the area upon completion of construction. A minor amount of vegetation disturbance and soil compaction will occur along the fence line as a result of fence construction and livestock trailing.

Little or no impact is expected to wildlife species or recreational use in the area. No impacts to threatened, endangered or candidate species of wildlife is expected from the proposed construction of the fence.

The project will have minimal impacts to visual resources. The fence will not be built on the skyline and is not close to any well-traveled roads and will be unnoticeable.

**Description of Mitigation Measures:** To prevent compaction and rutting, off-road travel will be prohibited when there is high moisture content in the soil. Therefore, off-road travel will only be during times when soil is dry or firm which should minimize adverse impacts to soil and vegetation. The proposed location of the MJ fence will be modified to minimize impacts to identified archeological resources, threatened and endangered species and wildlife.

**Persons/Agencies Consulted:**

Tony Joyce, *Grazing Permittee*  
Doug Young, *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*  
Ron Rembowski, *BLM Rangeland Management Specialist/ Ecologist*  
Albert Bammann, *BLM Wildlife*  
Cythia Tait, *BLM Fisheries*  
Diane Pritchard, *BLM Cultural Resources*  
Jean Findley, *BLM Botanist*  
Lynne Silva, *BLM Weed Management*  
Roy L. Masinton, *BLM Area Manager*

### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

On the basis of the information contained in this EA and all the other information available, it is my determination that the proposed action is in conformance with the land use plan for the area and does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

S/Roy L. Masinton  
Malheur Field Office Manager

02/25/99  
Date

## DECISION RECORD

On the basis of the information in this EA (OR -030- 98-009) and all other information available, it is my decision to implement the proposed action as described.

S/Roy L. Masinton  
Malheur Field Office Manager

02/25/99  
Date